

THE STORYTELLER'S *triad*

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OVERview

TABLE OF CONTENTS

01 INTRODUCTION 3
Opening thoughts

02 COURSE OBJECTIVES 4
& Florida Standards

03 THE LESSON PREP 7
Class Resources & Creating Anticipation

04 THE STORYTELLER'S TRIAD 13
The Lesson

- FIRST LEVEL/TIER 16
  The Hook
- SECOND LEVEL/TIER 18
  The Craft
- THIRD LEVEL/TIER 21
  The Mirror

05 THE SECRET FOUNDATION 23
The Elephant in the Room

06 THE TRIAD IN ACTION 26
The 3-Act Structure, Storyteller AI & T.R.U.T.H. Roadmap

07 SURPRISE CONCLUSION 30
Meaning in the Age of AI

08 ADDITIONAL RESOURCES 36

"I've learned that
people will forget what you said,
people will forget what you did,
but people will never forget
how you made them feel."
— Maya Angelou





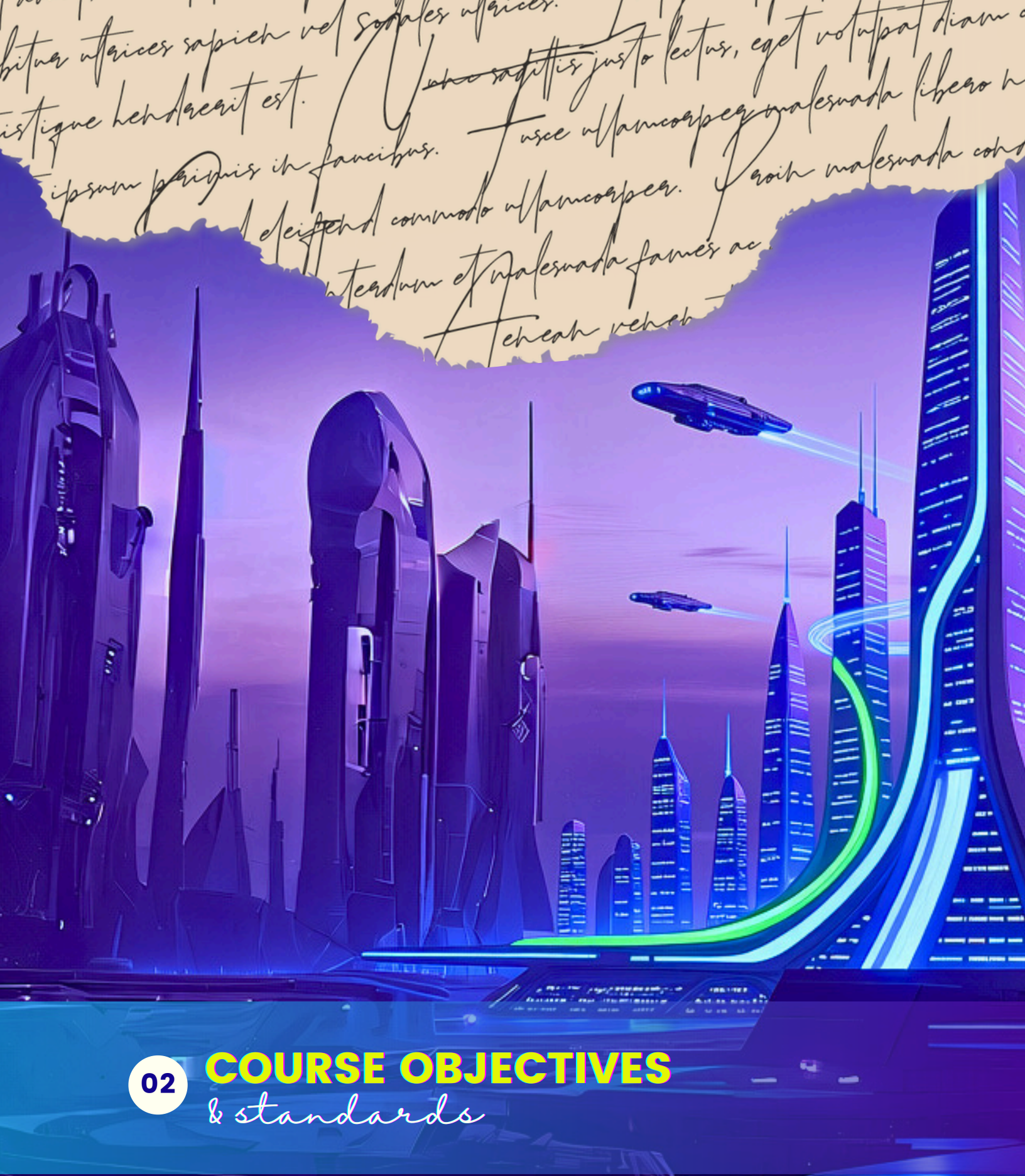
01 INTROduction

As her students well know, "**Ms. G**" is on a thirty-year mission to prove that the foundations of great storytelling are the same across all mediums. As an Emmy-winning storyteller, systems thinker, and educator, she has explored narrative through television, film, theater, journalism, immersive art, and education, eventually distilling those lessons into **The Storyteller's Triad©** —a cross-disciplinary framework for recognizing, preserving, and teaching human meaning in the age of AI.

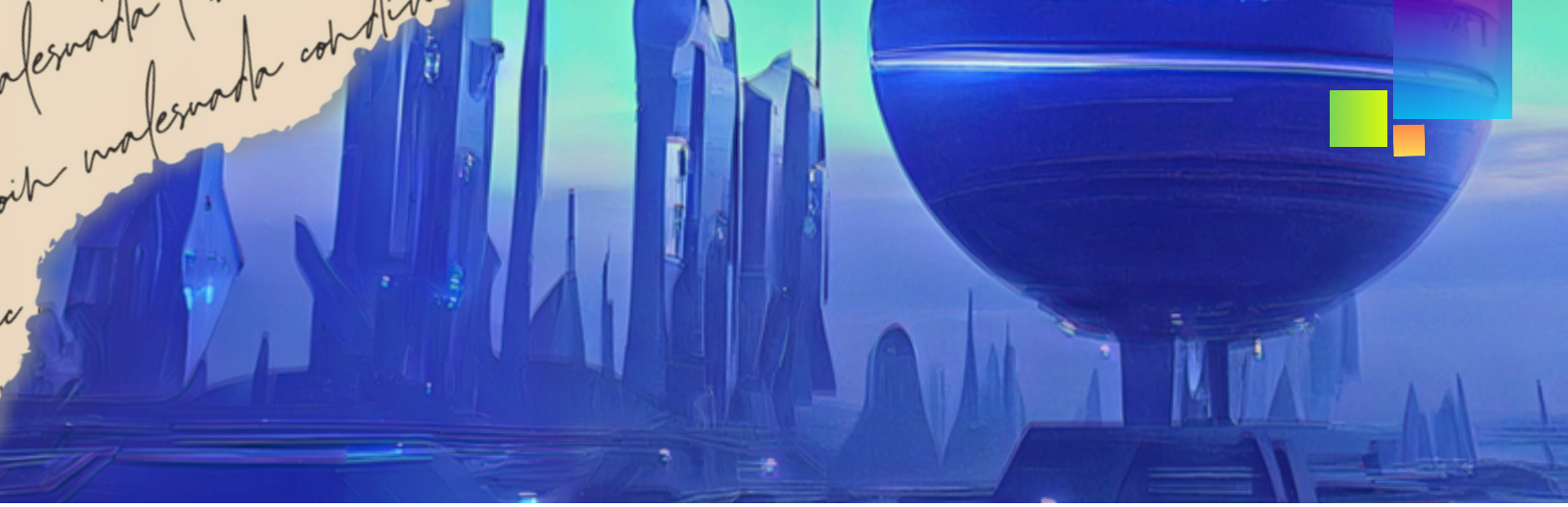
The framework was then tested in a real-world high school classroom, where students used it to develop award-winning work, including a 2026 Suncoast Chapter Student Production Award from the **National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences**.

But why does it work?

Because storytelling is far more than entertainment. Stories help human beings organize memory, identity, culture, and even… meaning itself.



02 COURSE OBJECTIVES & standards



COURSE *objectives*

By the end of this lesson, students and participants will be able to:

- Identify and apply the three levels and secret foundation of **The Storyteller's Triad**.
- Use **critical thinking** to analyze how perspective, emotional framing, craft, audience, and narrative structure influence meaning.
- Apply **systems thinking** to move beyond surface events and recognize underlying patterns, structures, assumptions, and perspectives.
- Analyze how **Point of View, Time, and Place** can change the meaning of the same event or story across journalism, film, literature, social media, and other forms of communication.
- Recognize how the **foundations of great storytelling** remain consistent across different mediums, disciplines, and human systems, even as the tools change.
- Apply the Triad through **adaptable classroom exercises,** using worksheets such as the Three-Act Structure or the T.R.U.T.H. Ethics Roadmap.
- Use storytelling to **strengthen media literacy,** ethical reasoning, creativity, empathy, and analytical thinking.
- **Explore AI as a creative and analytical collaborator** while preserving human judgment, perspective, authorship, and meaning.

Teachers will also learn:

- How to teach storytelling as **a cross-disciplinary framework for communication and meaning.**
- Ways to strengthen **critical thinking, systems thinking, media literacy, and narrative analysis** through Point of View.
- Practical activities adaptable across **journalism, science, business, technology, and the arts.**
- Ethical strategies for integrating AI without losing **human creativity, intention, or authorship.**
- How to adapt the Triad into additional classroom exercises using familiar structures from their own disciplines.



FLORIDA *standards*

Though this material is meant to be adapted across grade levels, the following standards apply to high school implementation:

- ELA.12.R.1.1 – **Evaluate how key elements enhance or add layers of meaning** and/or style in a literary text and explain their functional significance in interpreting the text.
- ELA.10.R.2.4 – **Argument**: Compare the development of two opposing arguments on the same topic, evaluating the effectiveness and validity of the claims, and analyzing how the authors use the same information to achieve different ends.
- ELA.11.R.3.3 – **Comparative Reading**: Compare and contrast how contemporaneous authors address related topics, comparing their use of reasoning and analyzing the texts within the context of the time period.
- ELA.11.R.3.4 – **Rhetoric**: Evaluate an author's use of rhetoric in text.
- ELA.12.R.2.3 – **Author's Purpose and Perspective:** Evaluate an author's choices in establishing and achieving purpose(s).
- ELA.12.R.2.4 – **Argument**: Compare the development of multiple arguments in related texts, evaluating the validity of claims, authors' reasoning, use of the same information, and/or rhetoric.
- ELA.12.R.3.4 – **Rhetoric**: Evaluate rhetorical choices across multiple texts.
- ELA.11.C.1.2 – **Narrative Writing**: Write complex narratives using appropriate techniques to establish multiple perspectives.
- ELA.12.C.1.2 – **Narrative Writing**: Write complex narratives using appropriate techniques to establish multiple perspectives and convey universal themes.
- ELA.12.C.1.5 – **Improving Writing**: Improve writing by considering feedback from adults, peers, and/or online editing tools, revising to enhance purpose, clarity, structure, and style.



03 THE LESSON

prep



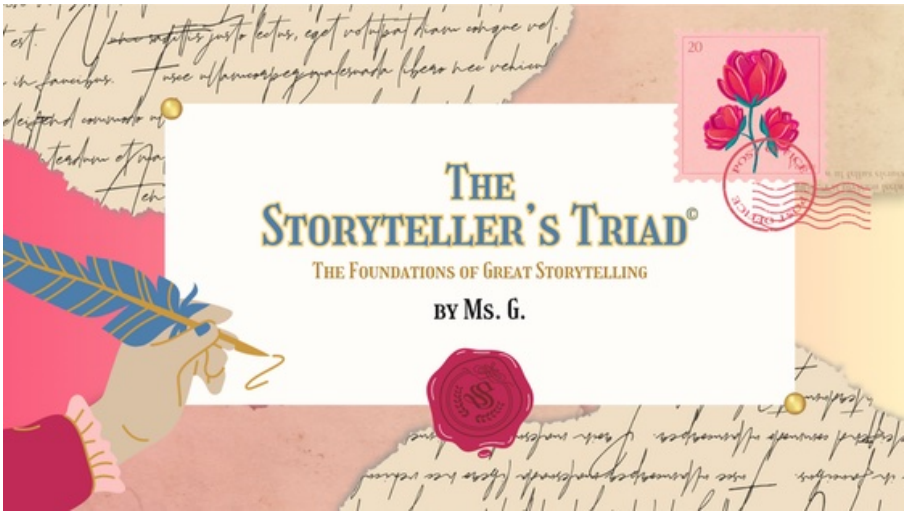
LESSON *prep*

1- Before class, prepare **The Storyteller's Triad©** presentation and the Triad worksheet. You can show the Triad in action by combining it with either the Three-Act Structure or the T.R.U.T.H. Ethics lesson (like we're doing in this workshop), but the choice is ultimately yours. All materials presented today will be shared electronically so they can be adapted to your own classroom.

2- Choose ONE supporting story to weave throughout the lesson. Film or television works particularly well because participants can experience writing, performance, music, editing, production, and visual design as different components of the same storytelling foundation.

3- Create excitement by hinting at the hidden "secret foundation" and the other surprises. This is like a great mystery book, and **you** are holding **the treasure map.**

Half the work is creating anticipation for the lesson.



Didn't attend the workshop? Email The Education Fund for digital copies of the presentation!



CLASS *resources*

S	• Projector, smart board, or presentation screen
S	• Computer or tablet with internet access
W	• **The Storyteller's Triad©** worksheets and classroom slides
E	• Sample media clips as story examples
S	• Optional: microphones/cameras for podcasting or multimedia storytelling projects

PROVIDED *by*

S = School
W = Workshop
E = Educator



ONLY EXPENSE:
The purchasing or renting of media clips for classroom viewing, though libraries may offer free alternatives.*

**Streaming services may be restricted.*

PERCHANCE *to sing*

Before starting, assign the room three simple call-and-response cues tied to each level of the Triad. The goal is not musical perfection—**it is association.** By connecting each level to a familiar phrase, sound, or song, students create an auditory mnemonic they can easily recall. **Participation creates memory.**



The auditory mnemonic is then reinforced by showing various clips from ONE chosen film, recorded stage performance, or television show. The idea is for them to see all three levels of the Triad within the SAME story in order to enjoy the **narrative's emotional payoff.** Thus, the lesson itself **unfolds like a story.**



[1] Lyrics from *"Popular"* from the musical *Wicked*, written by Stephen Schwartz.

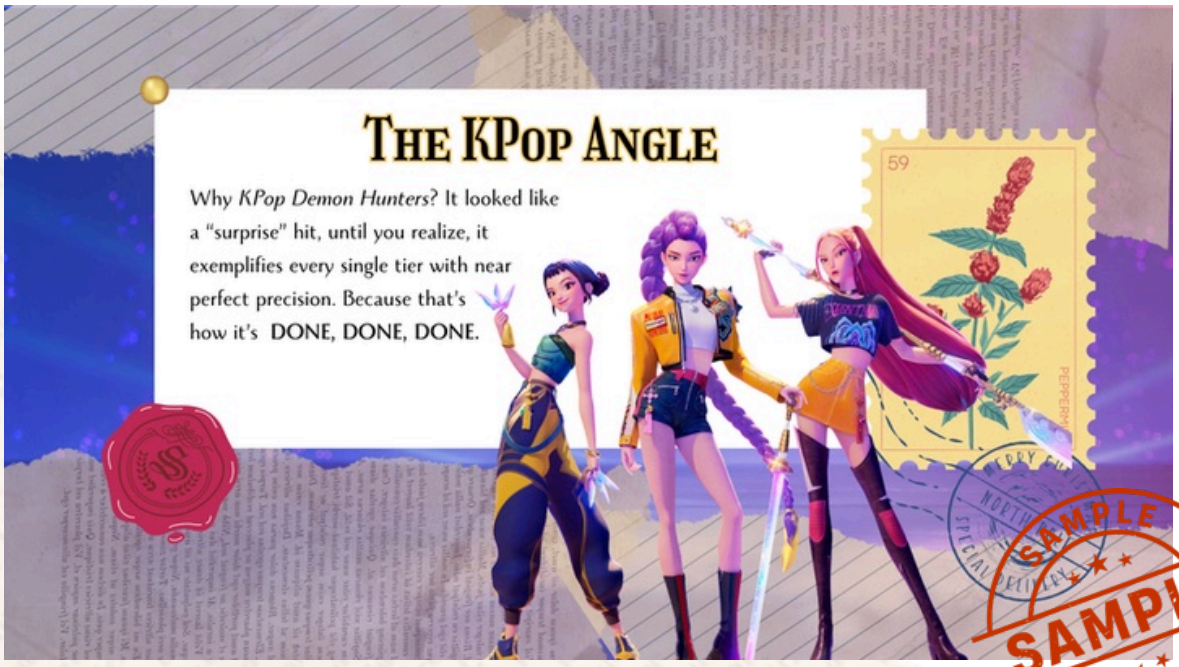
TODAY'S *story*

The Storyteller's Triad© was itself born through a particular story, though any compelling, age-appropriate narrative can be used to teach the framework.

Depending on available media, today's workshop may be taught using one of two stories:

- **Miami: Land of Dreams**—the original inspiration and testing ground for the Triad.
- A popular and contemporary example that demonstrates the same foundations at work—*sample shown; final selection made at workshop.*

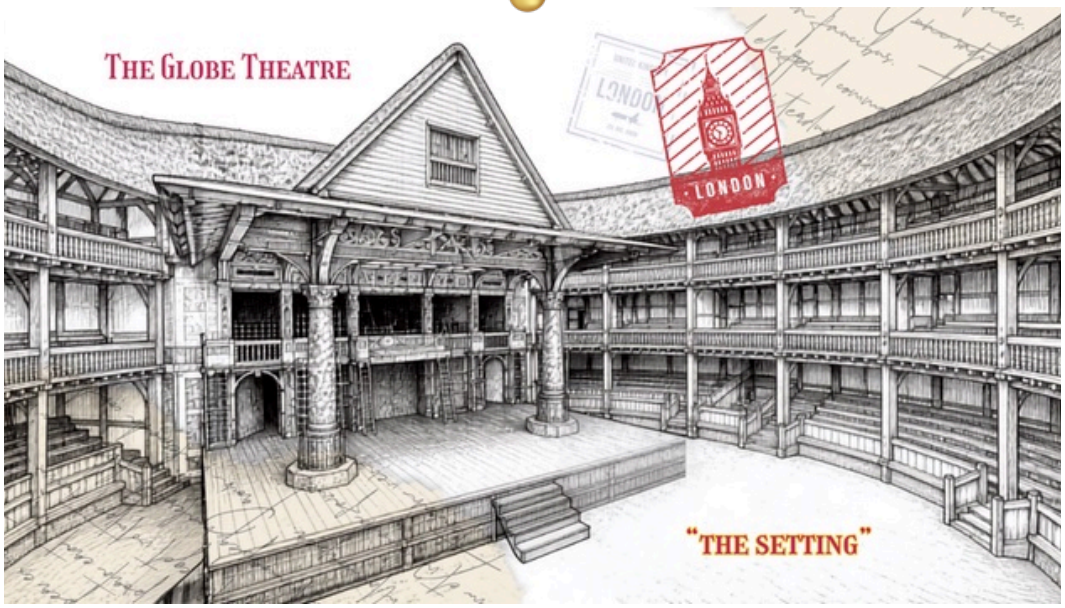


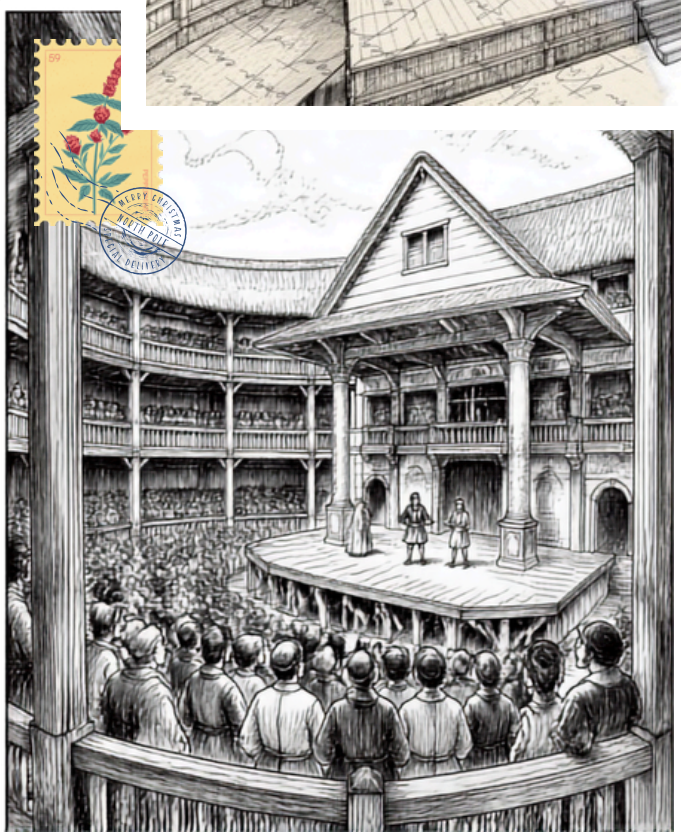


THE *anchor*

Timeless stories are always anchored in a particular **time and place**. So this lesson too is anchored in Shakespeare's **Globe Theatre**, whose physical levels become a visual metaphor for the three levels (and secret foundation) of the Triad.

For younger audiences, another familiar setting may be substituted, as long as it contains distinct levels or tiers that students can easily visualize and remember. The setting is not the framework. It is the **memory palace** that makes the framework easier to remember.









THE STORYTELLER'S TRIAD

the lesson



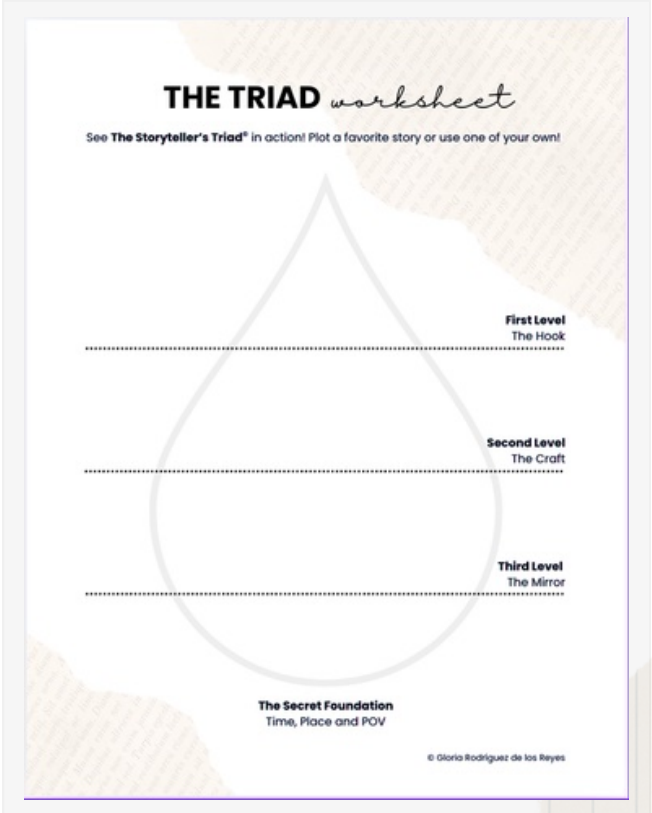
THE TRIAD *worksheet*

Distribute the Triad worksheet before teaching the three levels. The attached version is best for grades 9-12 as well as adults—including all of you.

Participants may select a story of their own choosing, or they can use the facilitator's selected story example. As each level is introduced, pause briefly and ask participants to add notes to the corresponding section.

Do not over-explain the worksheet—it is simply the visual representation of the Triad. However, do ask them to keep the completed worksheet.

We will return to it at the end.


THE TRIAD *worksheet*

See **The Storyteller's Triad®** in action! Plot a favorite story or use one of your own!

First Level
The Hook

Second Level
The Craft

Third Level
The Mirror

The Secret Foundation
Time, Place and POV

© Gloria Rodríguez de los Reyes


ARE YOU ready?

FIRST *level*

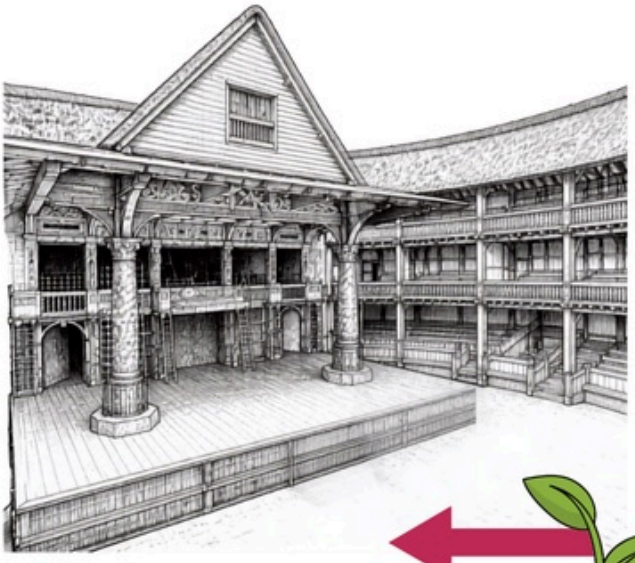
Ground Floor = The Hook

In Shakespeare's time, a penny bought you a spot in the "pit" in front of the stage—a standing area with no roof, exposed to sun and rain.

These "groundlings" were everyday folks—some were poor and uneducated—but always eager for a good story.

No one pays to see a BORING STORY, even if it's just a "penny." So consider this the "commerciality" of a story, because even Shakespeare needed to fill the seats.

First Level





To Watch or Not to Watch?

MAIN TAKEAWAY: The intellectual challenge and artistry involved in creating a great story cannot diminish the fact that you need people to ***want*** to see/hear/read it. Like in the filmmaking lesson, the old adage is still the same:

DON'T BE BORING

The most memorable classics, including all of Shakespeare's works, always involved some sort of **exciting** or **juicy event** that drew in the crowds: gossip, betrayal, passion and *murder*.

FIRST *level*



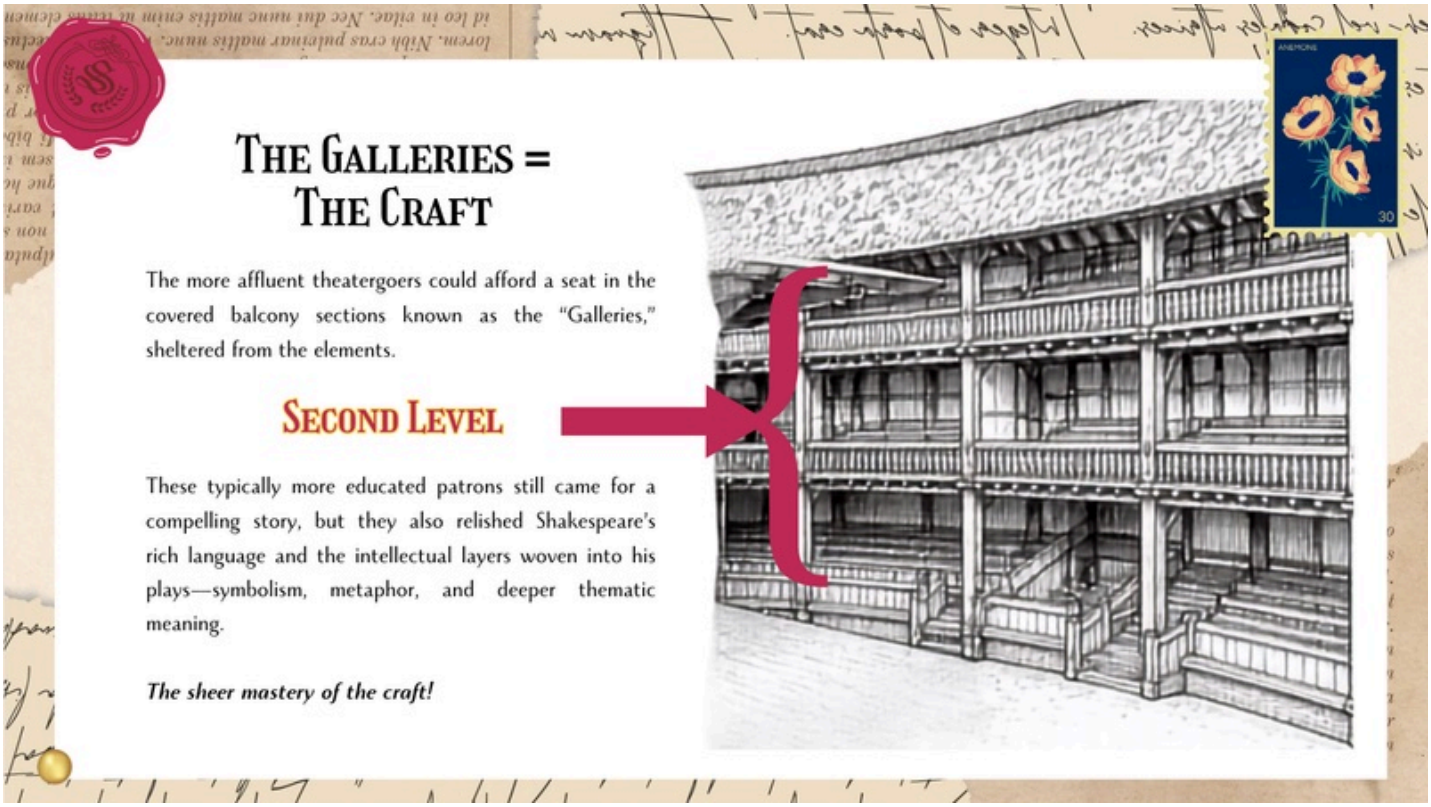
Now that the students have heard the mnemonic and learned the concept, it's time to show them how it operates inside a real story. Choose a scene with an irresistible hook: conflict, mystery, humor, danger, surprise, or spectacle. Ask the simplest question in storytelling: **Would you keep watching?** If so, then **why**?

The **First Level** is not about being shallow. It is about earning the audience's attention before asking them to go deeper.



STORY *example*

SECOND *level*

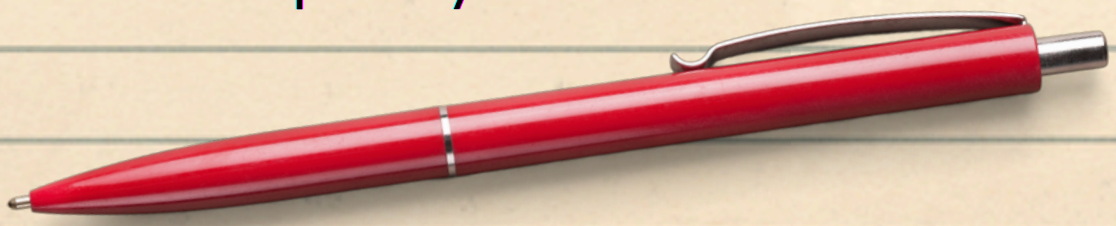




SECOND *level*

This is where the mediums diverge.

A novelist adds imagery and prose.
A filmmaker adds light and framing.
A journalist brings research and evidence.
A visual artist uses color and symbolism.
A songwriter mixes poetry with music.

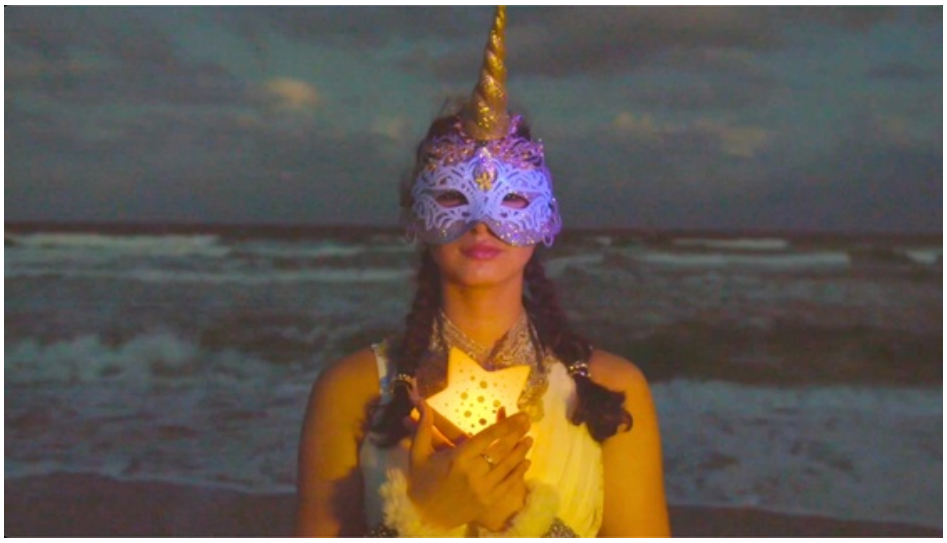


Though the tools may all change,
the **foundations of great storytelling**
remain the same.

SECOND *level*



Choose a scene that demonstrates **mastery of craft**. Do not limit the discussion to metaphor and language. Look at music, color, editing, performance, symbolism, research, composition, rhythm—or whatever tools belong to the chosen medium. How does each element enhance the narrative?



STORY *example*

THIRD level

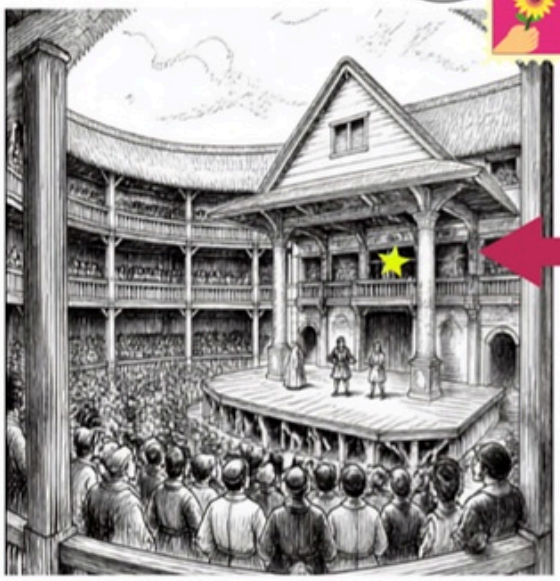
The Highest level = The Mirror

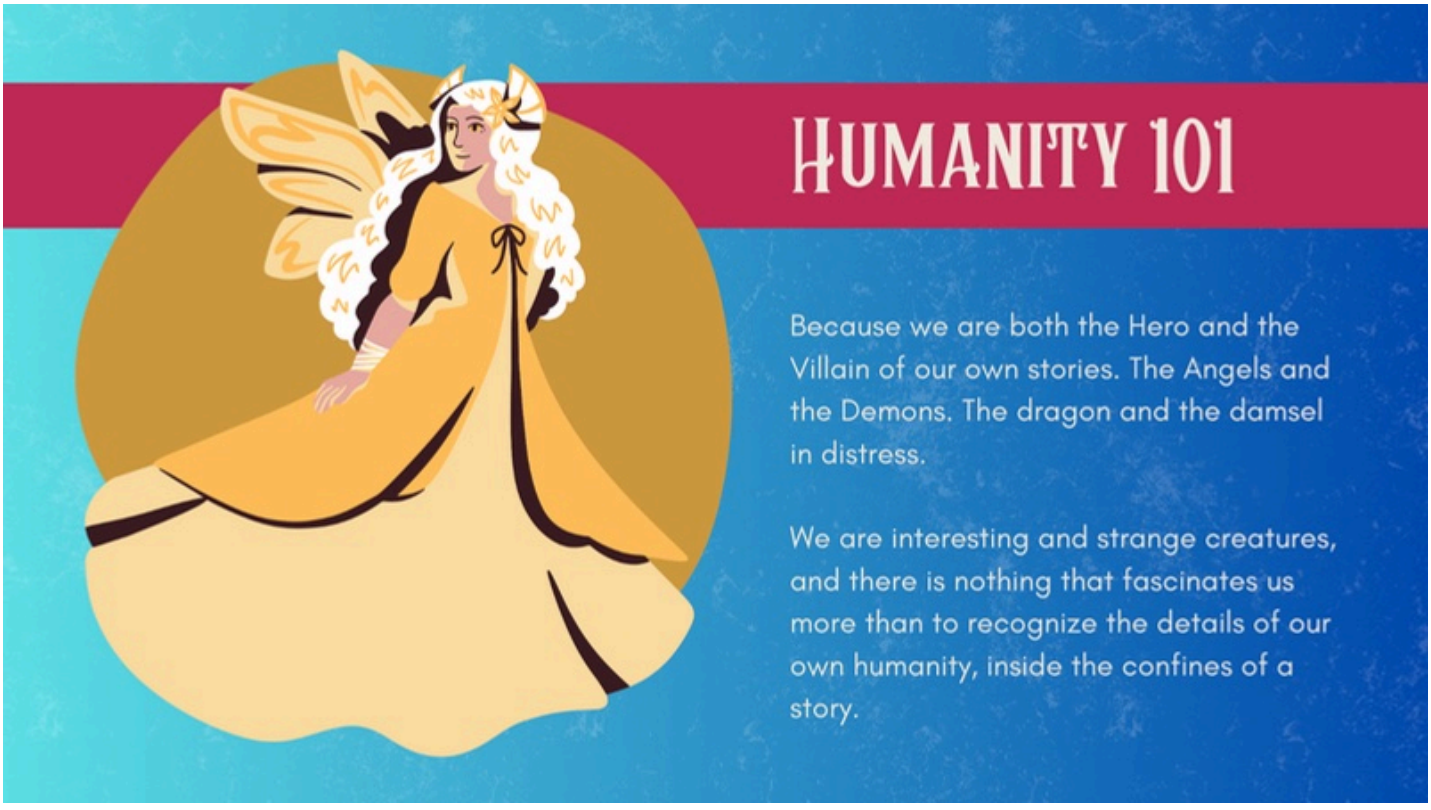
We'll use the special seats, usually reserved for the musicians, privileged spectators, or even used as part of the play as the highest level of the Triad: **The Human Angle.**

Third Level

You can search across time, in every literary classic ever written, and in every beloved story that still lingers to this day, and what they all have in common is the capacity to hold up a mirror to our own humanity.

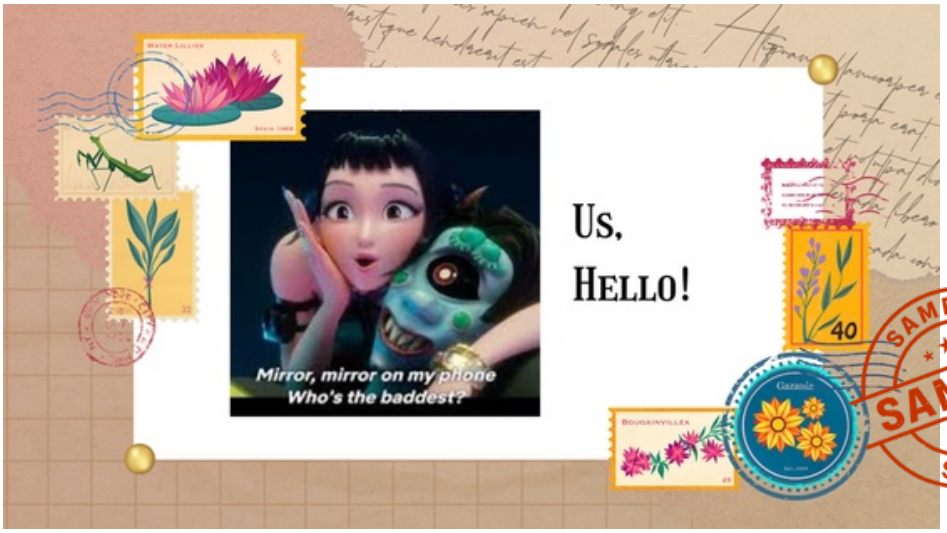
But *why?*





THIRD *level*





STORY *example*

Choose the most **emotionally powerful scene** in your selected story—but do not reveal the final resolution yet.

Let participants sit with the **emotional stakes.** Ask what the scene reveals about fear, love, belonging, loss, identity, hope, or another recognizable part of the Human Experience.

Save the **WHY.** You will need it later.

Just make sure you fill them in between clips so they know what's happening in the story!

05

THE SECRET *foundation*

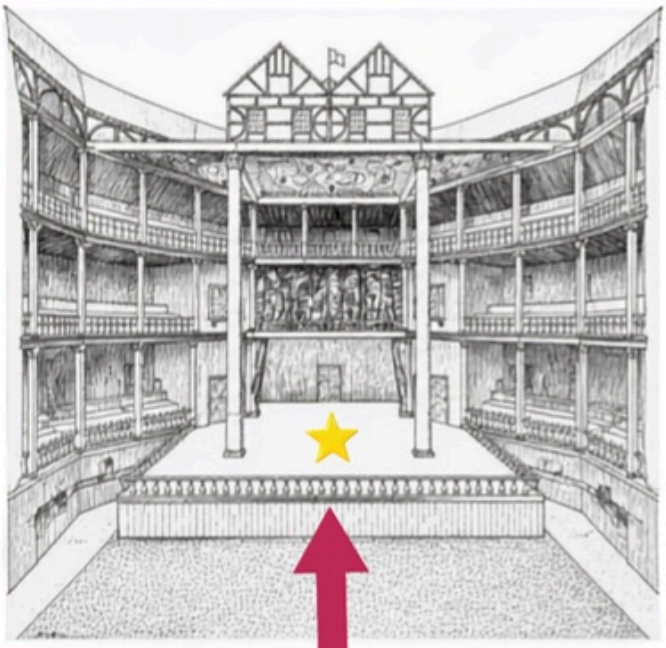


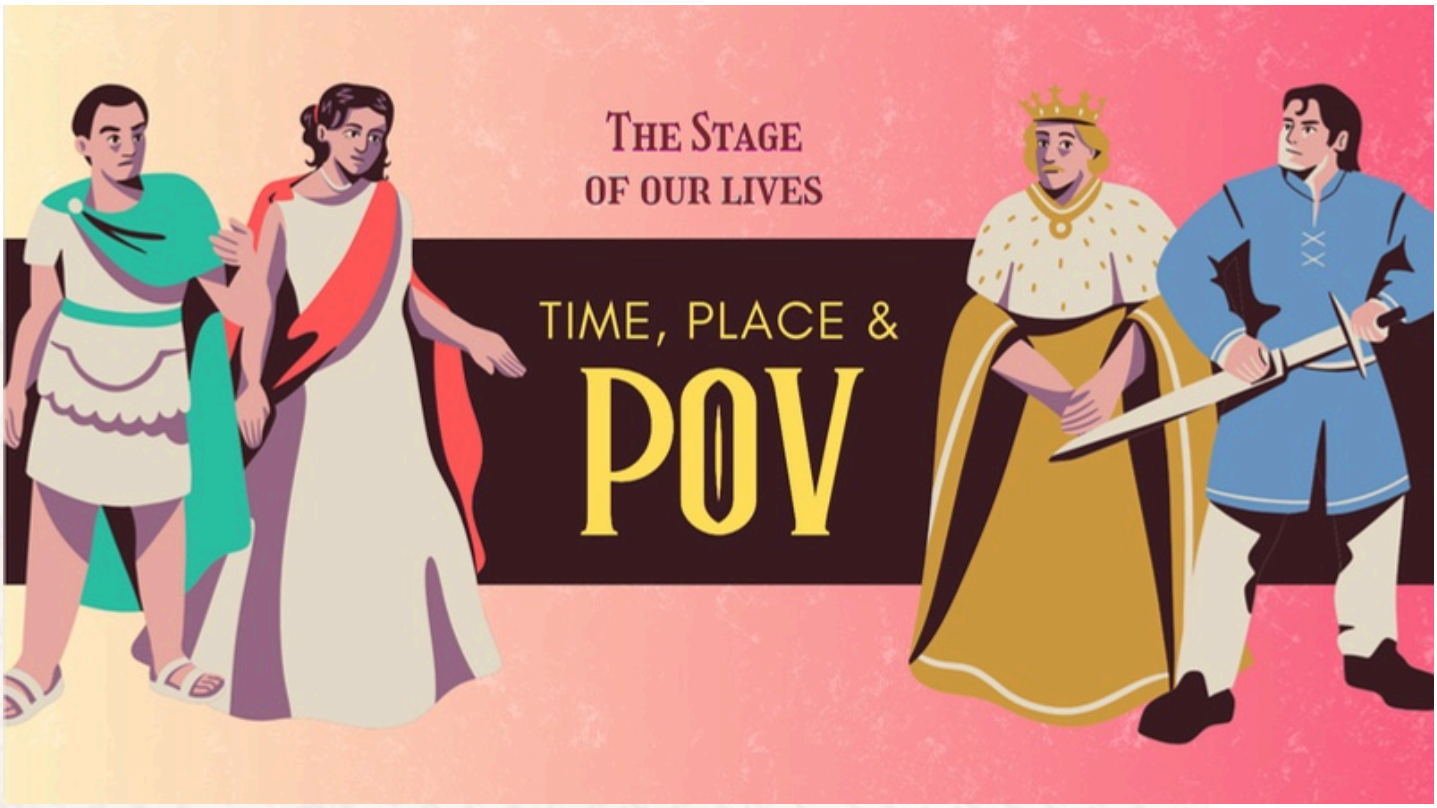
THE *foundation*

The Secret Foundation?

The caveat is that you can change the topic or theme of any of the three previous levels, and the story could essentially remain almost the same... but if you change the FOUNDATION... it becomes something completely new. Think of it this way: would "The Globe" still be a theater if it didn't have a STAGE?

And what is that secret foundation? That silent character that literally dictates the very basis of all great stories (and perhaps even the very concept of our reality)?





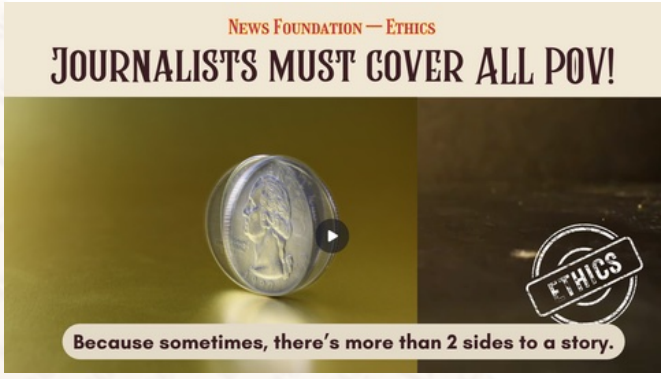


THE SILENT *Character*

POINT OF VIEW / PERCEPTION

Let's modify the ancient Indian story about the blind men and the elephant and instead imagine WE are all looking at that ELEPHANT, right here in the middle of this room. Depending on where you are, each one of us will have a very different perspective of the same animal, and every one of us will believe ***ours is the right one.***

But to truly "map out" the entire 3-dimensional shape of the elephant, we *need every single POV !*







06 THE TRIAD *in action*



THE *shift*

Now show the Triad in action. Review the three levels one more time—but this time, rename them:

- **First Level → Act I—Intro**
- **Second Level → Act II—Body**
- **Third Level → Act III—Conclusion**







Now, exercises like the three-act structure or the three-part essay become another way of organizing the same **underlying progression**: capture attention, develop the story, and reveal **why it matters.**

Let's use the sample journalism worksheet to reshape the story you began on your Triad worksheet, but this time with the help of a very special assistant...



STORYTELLER *ai*

The **Storyteller AI** is an interactive learning tool designed to encourage critical thinking, ethical communication, and human-centered creativity in the age of machines.

You can ask it to analyze a literary classic using the Triad or help brainstorm and outline your own story.

The goal is to use technology to enhance creativity and protect human meaning—not replace it!

Password will be provided at workshop.

For teacher use only. Student use requires district approval.

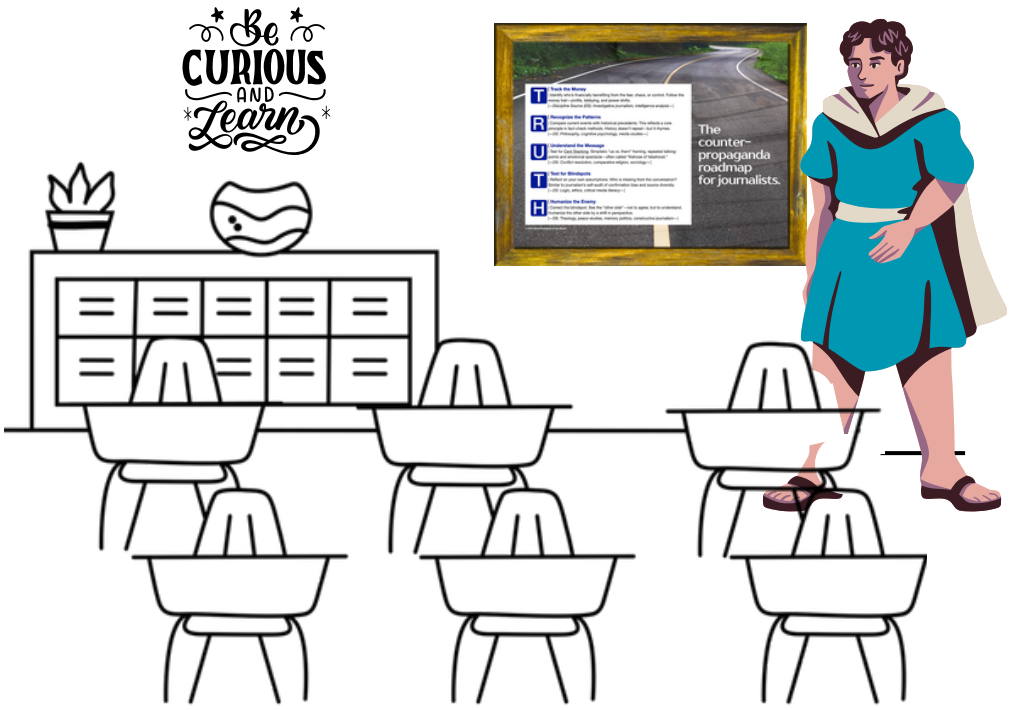


T.R.U.T.H. roadmap

Optional Media Literacy Extension: For journalism and media-literacy classrooms, educators may pair the Triad's POV lesson with the T.R.U.T.H. ethics framework to explore credibility, bias, evidence, and perspective. A copy of the poster is included under additional resources, and the print-ready file will be emailed with a copy of the PowerPoint or Keynote.

Like the Three-Act Structure exercise, all you have to do is review the Triad and rename the levels as follows:

- **First Level** → The Event (First "T")
- **Second Level** → Patterns & Structure ("R", "U" and the second "T")
- **Third Level** → "Human" Mental Nodes (the last "H")



"I've learned that
people will forget what you said,
people will forget what you did,
but people will never forget
how you made them feel."
— Maya Angelou

Workshop Research Assignment:

Did Ms. G attribute the opening quote correctly? Did Maya Angelou really say this?



07 SURPRISE
conclusion

PLOT twist

Remember this "teardrop" worksheet?

Well, it's not actually a teardrop. It's the **Systems Thinking Iceberg Model**[2]—because **The Storyteller's Triad©** can also be understood as an **Integrated Cognitive System.**

What began as a storytelling exercise has also been teaching you to recognize the patterns, structures, and perspectives *that shape meaning.*

Storytelling is also a laboratory for systems thinking.



EVENTS

First Level
The Hook

PATTERNS

Second Level
The Craft

STRUCTURE

Third Level
The Mirror

MENTAL MODELS

THE SECRET FOUNDATION
Time, Place and POV

[2] The Iceberg Model is a widely used systems-thinking tool. Its levels derive from Peter Senge's The Fifth Discipline (New York: Doubleday, 1990); the iceberg diagram itself is generally credited to Michael Goodman. Adapted here for narrative analysis.

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STORY RESOLUTION

"the why"







PROTECT *meaning*

In his book Narrative Ontology, philosophy professor Axel Hutter argues that language is *essential* to meaning-making and that the "meaning of human existence" cannot be understood through isolated moments but through the *larger story of a life*. Much like a book, we cannot fully understand its meaning until we have read every chapter, however long it takes. Thus, for Hutter, meaning can be "articulated **only in time."** [3]

Like an inside joke between two friends, it would seem that meaning is derived from the human experience, lived over time. **Without memory, there is no meaning.**

But how do we recognize, preserve, and teach this concept in the age of machines?

It's true that AI can now help us organize, answer questions, deepen research, illustrate, and even help us write. But the human storyteller brings something no prompt can ever manufacture on command: ***the total of all the parts of a lived human life.***

That's why Level 3—the mirror to our humanity—cannot be fully expressed in words; **it must be *felt.*** Perhaps Miguel, a character from the story *Miami: Land of Dreams,* describes it best:

> **"It is a snapshot of humanity in a specific moment in time. And you can recognize it when you see it, because it stirs something deep inside you, in that place where there are no words... just emotions and colors."**

For the stories that move us most—and have the power to change the world—are the ones that reflect the messy yet glorious nature... **of being human.**

[3] Axel Hutter, *Narrative Ontology,* trans. Aaron Shoichet (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2022), 11–12.



ANSWER TO THE PG 29 EXERCISE:

"They may forget what you said
— but they will never forget
how you made them feel."
— Carl W. Buehner, 1971

THE *end*



✦

INNER CIRCLE

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New work, upcoming performances, journal releases, and thoughts from the intersection of film, theater, and art.
✦ No noise. Only signal.

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sign up!



08 ADDITIONAL *resources*

THE TRIAD *worksheet*

See **The Storyteller's Triad©** in action! Plot a favorite story or use one of your own!

First Level
The Hook

Second Level
The Craft

Third Level
The Mirror

The Secret Foundation
Time, Place and POV

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Name: Class: Date:

3-ACT NEWS STORY

The secret to creating truly impactful and memorable reporting isn't just in *what* you say, but *how* you structure it. That's why we're going straight to one of the industry's most familiar structures: the **3-Act Story**.



ACT 1 - THE INTRO

Write a 10-20 second Voice Over (VO) that names the subject and states the main story idea. Your B-ROLL (supplemental footage under the VO) will need to support your words.

ACT 2 - THE BODY:

Answer the remaining W's and the H (but not the WHY). Use bullet points to organize facts and identify research gaps.

- WHO: The person or people involved.
- WHAT: The event or action that happened.
- WHEN: The date and time of the event.
- WHERE: The location of the event.
- HOW: The process or method used (The 1 H)

ACT 3 - THE CONCLUSION (WHY)

Deliver the emotional WHY: the final "human angle" that makes the audience feel or think. This concluding act is the most vital, and you may need to complete your body research before writing it.

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T | **Track the Money**
| Identify who's financially benefiting from the fear, chaos, or control. Follow the money trail—profits, lobbying, and power shifts.
|—*Discipline Source (DS): Investigative journalism, intelligence analysis*—|

R | **Recognize the Patterns**
| Compare current events with historical precedents. This reflects a core principle in fact-check methods. History doesn't repeat—but it rhymes.
|—*DS: Philosophy, cognitive psychology, media studies*—|

U | **Understand the Message**
| Test for Card Stacking. Simplistic "us vs. them" framing, repeated talking-points and emotional spectacle—often called "firehose of falsehood."
|—*DS: Conflict resolution, comparative religion, sociology*—|

T | **Test for Blindspots**
| Reflect on your own assumptions. Who is missing from the conversation? Similar to journalism's self-audit of confirmation bias and source diversity.
|—*DS: Logic, ethics, critical media literacy*—|

H | **Humanize the Enemy**
| Correct the blindspot. See the "other side"—not to agree, but to understand. Humanize the other side by a shift in perspective.
|—DS: Theology, peace studies, memory politics, constructive journalism—|

The counter-propaganda roadmap for journalists.

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Didn't attend the workshop? Email The Education Fund for this poster's print-ready file!